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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: BREAK-AWAY "DEMOCRATIC LEAGUE" FAILS TO
GAIN MOMENTUM

REF: PRISTINA 29

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Since the creation of the break-away Democratic League (LD) on January 12, LD leader and former Assembly speaker Nexhat Daci and his allies have tried to portray the party as a significant force that has hived off a good portion of the ruling Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). However, aside from a handful of municipalities -- albeit important municipalities -- in eastern Kosovo where former LDK officials appear to have broken for good with the LDK party, the LD appears to be continuing the tradition of LDK splinter parties that fail to gain significant popular momentum. Their six deputies in the Kosovo Assembly, while potentially a factor in any future vote of no-confidence against the government, are apparently loath to shake up the status quo for the time being or to incur the wrath of the international community by opposing any part of President Ahtisaari's settlement document. END SUMMARY.

Split in LDK and Formation of "Democratic League" Fails to Ignite Spark

¶2. (C) The split between the ruling Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and its break-away faction, the Democratic League (LD), is still evolving, but the fear of a decisive party rupture that would roil the political waters in Kosovo has not materialized. Moving with surprising speed despite earlier public avowals to the contrary, former Assembly Speaker Nexhat Daci announced the creation of the LD, with himself as leader, in early January. Daci, who arguably might have benefitted more by staying within the LDK and continuing his pressure on LDK stalwarts including Kosovo President Sejdiu, apparently was pushed by his supporters -- who were frozen out of LDK party councils -- to accelerate his timetable and create a new party. While the LD gained immediate publicity by signing up six former LDK Assembly delegates, a sufficient number to create a new Assembly caucus, no further delegates were brave or foolish enough to cross LDK party lines, at least not publicly.

Some Municipalities in Eastern Kosovo Demonstrate Support for

Daci; Violence Possible

¶3. (C) The LD continued to stall over the next weeks. Fearful of losing their new name because OSCE would likely deem it too close to that of the LDK, the LD leadership postponed registering as a party until after its founding convention in February. Moreover, while the LD maintains it has shaved off a significant part of the LDK, little has occurred of substance to prove this claim. At the municipal level, the mayor of Gjilan, Xhemajl Hyseni, remains the only figure to openly join Daci, and is the only one of three municipal party branch leaders in Gjilan to defect.

¶4. (C) Hyseni claims that 16 of the 22 LDK members of the municipal assembly in Gjilan are now Daci supporters, although this figure is disputed by the LDK branch leader. A handful of other municipalities -- including Viti, Ferizaj, and Kamenice -- could be LD strongholds as well. In Viti, our sources tell us there are apparently enough Daci supporters to force out the mayor, a supporter of President Sejdiu, while in Kamenice twice as many people attended the recent LD commemoration of the first anniversary of President Rugova's death than the rival event sponsored by the LDK. However, it is unclear what more the LD can accomplish in these areas, since the LDK operates with the tacit support of the PDK in some of them, further complicating the LD's room for maneuver. There have been incipient signs of trouble between LDK and LD supporters, particularly in Gjilan, where conflict has erupted over property (office, equipment) previously used by the LDK and now claimed by the LD; an explosion near those premises over the weekend of January 26 could be connected with the party split. Earlier such confrontations between Daci and Sejdiu supporters in the

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initial stages of the party presidential campaign ended after a brief spate of tit-for-tat violence.

Daci Supporters at Kosovo Level Also Think Twice

¶5. (SBU) At the Kosovo level, as well, former Daci activists and branch leaders chose quickly to rejoin the ranks of the LDK in the wake of Daci's loss to President Sejdiu for the party leadership. The LDK branches in the municipalities of Obilic and Rahovec did so, and Public Services Minister Termkoli, once considered a Daci sympathizer, has remained with the LDK in order to retain her ministerial position. The LD's six deputies in the Kosovo Assembly, while potentially a factor in any future vote of no-confidence against the government, voted with the government in the end-of-year budget debate, and remain apparently loath to shake up the status quo or to incur the wrath of the international community by opposing any part of President Ahtisaari's settlement document.

¶6. (C) Still, the LD caucus in the Assembly bears watching in the longer term as potentially susceptible to the siren song of opposition leader Hashim Thaci, in his quest to unseat the current government and install himself as Prime Minister. Thaci and Daci together, even with the support of other opposition parties, would be unable to form a new government (nor would Thaci want Daci as a partner, recognizing that Daci is distasteful to the international community), but they could demonstrate in a no-confidence vote the weakness of the sitting government and press for changes to the governing coalition.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: It is too early to place Nexhat Daci's Democratic League in the trash heap with the other LDK splinter parties that have failed over the years. However, the LD does not appear to be gaining significant momentum beyond its natural audience in eastern Kosovo, where fears over the content of Ahtisaari's package, specifically with regard to the decentralization provisions, have engendered false hope that support for Daci might help change the shape of the Ahtisaari requirements. Daci's autocratic brand of

leadership appears to be losing out to the more moderate and unifying style of President Sejdiu, an encouraging sign as we approach the upcoming Ahtisaari visit on Feb. 2. END
COMMENT.

¶8. (SBU) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable in its entirety for release to U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
KAIDANOW